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Becoming a man: exploring multiple voices of masculinity amongst a group of young adolescent boys in Alexandra Township, South Africa

Langa, Malose

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ABSTRACT

The current study was aimed at exploring multiple voices of masculinity amongst township black adolescent boys in a particular South African setting of Alexandra Township, historically a working class community situated on the east side of Johannesburg. Thirty-two adolescent boys between the ages of 12 and 19 were recruited from two high schools in Alexandra and provided with disposable cameras to take 27 photos under the theme 'my life as a boy' in South Africa. Arrangements were made for these photos to be collected and processed. These photos were used to facilitate in-depth focus group discussions and individual interviews with each of the participants. In analyzing the data, the researcher combined discursive and applied psychoanalytic perspectives to identify meanings and contradictions that boys made in spoken texts about hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities. The key themes that emerged are that there are different ways of being a boy and that this process is characterised by mixed feelings of ambivalence, hesitation and self-doubt. It was evident that the process of negotiating all these voices of masculinity was not easy. The participants in the study seemed to simultaneously comply with and oppose hegemonic norms of masculinity in their narratives, revealing that negotiating alternative voices of young township masculinities is fraught with emotional costs and sacrifices. In conclusion, it is recommended that appropriate interventions need to be initiated and implemented to reduce high risk-taking behaviours associated with 'hegemonic' views of masculinity.

Key terms: Boys; Hegemonic; Masculinity; Township.